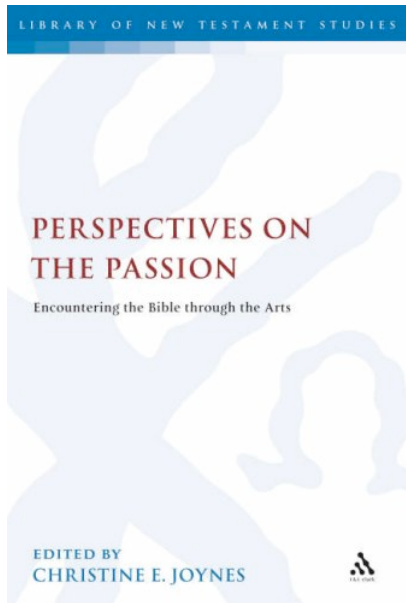


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Joynes, Christine E., ed.

Perspectives on the Passion: Encountering the Bible through the Arts

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This remarkable volume, which is the product of a well-conceived series of seminars and a conference, manages to avoid the pitfalls of many a multiauthored volume by having one central theme and allowing the variety to appear in the mode and breadth of the treatment. At its heart is one of the key moments of the Christian religion, an inspiration for artists, composers, and writers for two thousand years. It provides a striking testimony to the enormous potential of the emerging interest in the reception history of the Bible; the possibilities are well-exemplified in this volume. Throughout there is evidence of the ways in which the biblical text is explored in the various media considered, so that the passion of Christ is less a peg on which to hang the essays as collectively a serious attempt to explore the nature of biblical exegesis through the arts. The editor notes that there was also a performance of Passiontide music and an art exhibition by the Cambridge-based artist, Kip Gresham, during the conference.

There is a comprehensive and illuminating introduction that traces the various threads in the volume by outlining the contents as Christine Joynes demonstrates her complete grasp of the material of her participants to summarize in masterful fashion the essays that follow.

The first essay is, appropriately enough, by Ulrich Luz, the doyen of the reception history of the Bible. As well as discussion of methodological issues and a lament over the demise of the “affective” in the iconoclasm of Protestantism, Luz considers artistic interpretations of the passion narrative, including Giotto’s *Kiss of Judas* and Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*. Alongside well-known images such as Giotto’s *Kiss of Judas* he considers the significance of lesser-known artists like Janusz Szpyt and Guido Rocha.

Peter Hawkins explores the humanity of Jesus as it emerges in the Gethsemane scene and the tension between the “two natures” of Christ in various literary portrayals. Tim Gorringer reminds us of both the political character of the crucifixion of Jesus and the ongoing actualization of the event. He looks at ways in which the passion of Christ might have been used a tool of social control as well as those that bring out its political significance (Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* is once again considered). Robin Jensen examines the intriguing question of the late appearance of the crucifixion in early Christian art and considers the emergence of the Christian church as the powerful religious community in antiquity.

At first sight, music may not seem to be a likely source of information about exegesis of the Bible in another medium. Emma Hornby illuminates the ways in which key pieces of text were highlighted by particular musical phrases. She argues that music may reflect the interpretative focus of conventional literary exegesis. William Flynn explores the relationship between the medieval office of the Compassion of Mary and allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs. J. R. Watson’s discussion of hymnody underscores the importance of actualization in hymn writing as the paradox of the cross as a thing of shame becomes a means of spiritual health. The cosmopolitan perspective of the volume is demonstrated by Jaime Lara’s consideration of emerging Latin American Christianity especially as it reacted to pre-conquest religion. It is the sacrifice that pervades Regina Schwartz’s comparison of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and the passion narratives. She considers if Shakespeare seeks to get his audiences to reconsider the relationship between sacrifice and murder. Interestingly, she raises the question whether, as a result of the Reformation, the theater began to replace the church as a site of significant ritual as compared with the church. This is a theme she has explored at greater length in her book *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008). So, social and theological change is worked out in key literary texts.

The book concludes with Sara Maitlands’s short story “Bad Friday,” specially commissioned by the BBC for its Holy Week broadcast. This was performed by the author at the conference, raising interesting questions about the relationship between the effect of a performed text and the intention of its author—a unique opportunity to consider the relationship between the different moments in a text’s genesis and the

history of its interpretation. There is an afterword by Nancy Macky, who underlines the ways in which the essays explore responses of sorrow, sympathy, empathy, gratitude, compassion, consolation, hope, and transformation. The book has a comprehensive index, forty-three illustrations, and six musical examples.

Not only this is an exemplary collection that demonstrates the possibilities of reception history in biblical studies, but it does so with a profundity and coherence that is rarely achieved in collections of this kind. Christine Joynes has assembled a first-class collection of commentators whose very interdisciplinary points to the rich potential for collaborative work in the humanities but also shows how central the biblical text is to cultural history. The scope of this volume is largely the legacy of Western Christianity. That restricted range of interest is less important than the interest it generates and the possibilities it throws up for new work. There is an ongoing need to work out a methodology for this burgeoning discipline. The standard theoretical work on reception theory has not always been most suitable for understanding the complex theological, historical, and sociological factors at work in the engagement with the Bible. The relationship between text and image, a thorny question since Lessing's classic essay and a subject on which scholars such as W. J. T Mitchell have cast much light, is another pressing issue. Martin O'Kane's *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (2007) points forward to a firmer grasp of the exegetical potential of interpretation in another medium, something that is borne out by the drift of many of these essays in this book. It is perhaps unfair to ask for more when one has been offered so much, but a retrospective commentary in which some of the threads could have been drawn together in the form of a methodological reflection would have rounded off beautifully this coherent collection of essays. If this volume does nothing else, it has showcased the central role that reception history should have in the future of biblical studies. Christine Joynes deserves our gratitude for the significance of this achievement, exemplified in the wisdom of her choice of authors and the coherence that she has given to the volume that she has edited.